

LDS Women's Scripture Study

Course Outline

A Relief Society Activity Group

*How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. . .
For with thee is the fountain of life :
in thy light shall we see light.
Psalm 36:7-9*

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this scripture study is for you to drink of the pure "fountain", and to deepen, in a direct way, your relationship and understanding of the great and matchless Savior of the world. One of the obvious conditions of mortality is that we need daily food and drink or we weaken and eventually die. Less obvious to us, but just as true, is that our spirits need a comparable "feeding" process, or we weaken and die spiritually. There is no better metaphor for what we need to grow and prosper spiritually in this life than that of eating and drinking.

For many it is difficult to really be "fed" by reading the scriptures. We prefer fiction or historical fiction, which make events seem to come alive. Scripture commentaries may clarify confusing cultural or textual puzzles and seem to answer all our questions. "Church books" may give ready-made insights. Although all of these are useful, none of them can take the place of the Holy Scriptures themselves. The Lord's command to us is to search the SCRIPTURES. Consistent and sincere scripture study can empower you, protect you and distill upon you pure knowledge that will turn you to the Father's will and transform your soul. A woman who is able to glean insights for her own life from the scriptures has established the relationship with her Savior by which she "come[s] unto Him." She knows that the Holy Spirit has communicated something directly to her own heart and mind; this creates a bridge between our own souls and our God. It creates in our lives a confidence and a vital resource when we need help in life situations.

So, congratulations on making time to come and accept the gracious invitation of the Lord---

"Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not..." 2nd Nephi 9:51

Guidelines for the Study

As noted, this scripture study is for YOU to learn to feast when you come to the scriptures. This is not a class in which we come to hear what a teacher has learned through his or her study. We meet to share with each other what the Lord has taught us through our own study and to encourage one another in this endeavor. We will have the best experience if we all follow these guidelines:

- 1.** Read and do your questions without looking at any commentary beforehand.
- 2.** As you read and answer questions, note the verse where you found your answer. This helps others to understand and discuss your ideas.
- 3.** Because we only meet twice as month, we hope you will attend the sharing session faithfully. Even if your lesson is not complete, you will be buoyed up by others. Where 2 or 3 meet in His name, He is there! In our group sharing session, to encourage all who have studied their lessons, we ask that you refrain from commenting on any question for which you have not written an answer.
- 4.** Always begin your study with a simple prayer for the Spirit's help. What we ask for, He graciously gives. By our taking the time to ask for His help in studying the scriptures, Heaven's resources are made available to us and we become grateful for what we receive.
- 5** You will note that this study does not rely on the authority of outside sources. That is not because there aren't good ones available. But using the scriptures themselves to explain other scripture is what is meant by "searching the scriptures." This may take more "digging" but in the end, things learned this way will not be easily forgotten because of the effort you put in to find answers; and you will truly find the scriptures becoming a well of living water in your life.
- 6.** We encourage you to keep a three ring-binder of all your lessons and notes. This will become a valuable resource to you.
- 7.** Sharing with each other our insights into the scriptures and our spiritual journeys creates a marvelous bond of trust and closeness. Please be sensitive and completely trustworthy. Never share something about another person who has not given his or her permission to do so.
- 8.** Do not read the study notes or any outside material when answering questions. You need to know how great a resource You and the Spirit are when combined!
- 9.** Meetings are short and do not include flower centerpieces or food! (Can we DO this?) Do not bring children. Mothers of little ones who want to be in this study can perhaps rotate babysitting.

The Scripture Study Tools: A Resource Guide

1. **FOCUS ON THE WORDS --** When we trace a word and its meaning across all the standard works, we learn all the nuances of meaning associated with its use. You will be amazed what great insights you will come up with by this relatively simple process. Learn to use the LDS.org scripture study and search capabilities.
2. **FOCUS ON THE PATTERNS--** Get the lay of the land---an overview. Get an overall sense of the form of what you're reading. Note when something is a)poetry, b)a letter, c)narrative history, d)a sermon, e)chiasmus, f)a list, g)doctrinal explication, etc.. Cut the chapters into bite size sections which can be "digested" readily and remembered more easily. Which leads to:
3. **ANNOTATING AND MARKING FOR MEMORY--** Don't be too dainty! Draw on your scriptures! Connect verses with arrows; make titles for sections as you discern them; number lists as you find them; record your personal insights. Your scriptures will then become a precious and personal record of what you have learned.
4. **FOCUS ON THE GRAND DESIGN--** The LDS people have a certain advantage when it comes to studying scripture because they are always aware that there is an overall grand plan and design to God's dealings with His children. When you build a building you begin with a found-ation and you deliberately and purposefully add additional elements according to the overall plan. Much in the Old Testament is foundational to understanding that plan and the parts of it that will come in the New Testament. Always read with the Big Blueprint in mind.
5. **FOCUS ON SHADOWS AND TYPES--** At every point there are hints, prophecies, and foreshadowings that suggest things to come, and also that hearken back to the overall plan which was laid "before the foundation of the world." Some things point forward; others hearken backward. Your enjoyment and understanding will be so much greater when you see these relationships that exist between small details (elements of the Mosaic law for instance) and the central role of our Savior in the Big Blueprint.
6. **FOCUS ON THE PEOPLE--** In the scriptures are marvelous biographical sketches of real people. They are presented with great honesty, "warts and all", as we say. We should study and learn from the lives of these individuals.
7. **FOCUS ON THE LANGUAGE--** Learn to appreciate and use the language of the Lord. As we become familiar with the scriptures, it will become more and more natural to think and speak and pray in the phrases we find there. One of the great gifts of the scriptures is that the language we find there can give greater power to our own prayers. (Ps 61:2 for example, "... my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I." or Mark 9:24 "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!")
8. **FOCUS ON THE THEMES--** Learn to pick out the "big ideas" with wide application that are treated in the scriptures. These are the things you remember from your literature classes: the nature of good and evil, redemption, human suffering, etc. There are also some themes peculiar to scripture, such as Zion vs. Babylon. As you read, think "What does this teach me about (name your theme) ?

9. FOCUS ON LIKENING-- The word 'likening', of course, comes from the well known scripture in 1 Nephi 19:23, "...for I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning." Here's one way of understanding this concept: Imagine you were reading a huge book on Food, including chapters on the history of agriculture, on food preparation, food and holidays, etc. No matter how long you pored over the pages of this book, it would not fill you up or provide fuel for your body. But now imagine that this was an enchanted book, and that you could actually reach through the pages and pull back out into your real world a peach or a sandwich and have it for lunch. That would be some book! Well, guess what. The scriptures are some books! We can liken things in them to ourselves, which is like pulling out of their pages a truth that we then apply to our own present time needs and situation, and this word of God will provide life giving nourishment and light to our own spiritual lives.

10. FOCUS ON FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE-- Scriptures often teach truth by comparing or rhetorically equating one thing with another. We are all familiar with Jesus being called "the Lamb of God" for example, to emphasize his innocence and purity, which the mental image of a lamb calls forth. The various figures of speech---metaphor, allegory, simile, etc, --will be studied in more depth as we come upon them in the text.

11. AFTER FOCUSING, PONDER-- After we have prayed for enlightenment, used our God-given brain power, and focused on the various elements we find in the word of God, it is time to do what the scriptures say and 'ponder' the things we have read. There is something powerful in mentally relaxing from the study mode and letting our minds just "be still and know" that God is God. Mary and Nephi were both said to have "pondered in their heart". It is often into such quiet moments that the still small voice comes.

We wish you well in your personal study of God's word. The authors can bear their personal testimony of the great worth of spending time in God's word. Too many Latter Day Saint women avoid personal scripture study because they think it must be done by a BYU professor, priesthood leader, seminary teacher, or some other expert in order to 'get it right.' It is our strong conviction that studying with too great an emphasis on discovering the official or correct interpretation of every scripture will only paralyze you. If you are to make your study a living relationship with the Living Author of the scriptures, you must believe that He will talk to you about your life through His word. You must also believe that a close and careful reading of the words of scripture themselves will produce your own insights that will be valuable and meaningful to you because you found them. Always relying on the insights of others will leave you as weak as if you always relied on the muscles of others to do your lifting. Flex your scripture muscles! You're gonna love this!